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Members of staff from across the hospital trust with the award

Trust staff win award for improved waiting times at hospital A&E sites

SOUTHPORT and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust has won an award for 'Most Improved Trust in the North of England' for the 'outstanding' progress staff made towards meeting waiting times in A&E.

Trust bosses say A&E has been a consistent top performer since the summer.

The award was made at an event in Leeds for NHS trusts this month by NHS Improvement (NHSI), the national quality and financial regulator.

Ailsa Brotherton, from NHSI, said: "The team at Southport and Ormskirk have delivered focused improvements and have won the award for the Most Improved Trust in terms of their A&E performance.

"This is impressive work against a backdrop of increasing challenges and increasing demand.

"Huge congratulations to the whole team."

Dr Dave Snow, associate medical director for urgent care at the trust, said: "A&E is the most visible sign of a busy hospital.

"We've shown how staff working together across the hospital - from the front door, to discharge and out into the community - can create great results for patients."

SMUGGLING GANG LEADER JAILED FOR SIX YEARS

Report by **Henry James**

Customs team thwarted plot to evade £10m tax on illegal cigarettes

A MAN from Aughton, described as the ringleader of a £10m cigarette smuggling gang, has been jailed for six years.

Fifty-seven-year-old Raymond Hughes and fellow members of the five-strong gang attempted to import three large freight consignments of illegal cigarettes from Europe and China, describing them as mattresses and automotive parts on Customs paperwork to try to evade detection.

However, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), working with Border Force, investigated the gang, tracking their illegal activities, suspicious travel abroad and meetings in service stations, roadside cafes and pubs.

Hughes, of Elmsfield Park, Aughton, held regular 'business meetings' in a roadside cafe and other locations that offered free Wi-Fi in a bid to avoid being caught.

HMRC even found a text message between the fraudsters claiming "nothing can be traced" because they used public Wi-Fi to communicate and track their illegal imports.

The gang used the Internet to create fake businesses, aliases and contact shipping companies to give the impression of trading in other goods. But despite them using free Wi-Fi and disposable mobile phones, HMRC traced many of the fake emails and false identities to the men's home IP addresses and personal mobiles.

Raymond Hughes

Tony Capon, assistant director of HMRC's Fraud Investigation Service, said: "Hughes lived in an expensive house, drove a Porsche Cayenne and travelled the world, but he never declared any legitimate income or business trading to HMRC. He operated a criminal network to smuggle, transport, store and sell illegal cigarettes and tobacco, purely to evade tax. This was a serious attempt on an industrial scale to steal millions of pounds from the public purse and undermine local businesses."

Hughes was directly linked to the container-loads of illegal cigarettes seized at UK border points and inland. He travelled extensively abroad to source the illegal cigarettes from criminal suppliers.

He claimed to be the boss of Ray Sport Ventures, a company based in Singapore that imported teddy bears, razor blades and computer parts from China. HMRC investigators found Hughes had not declared any income for several years despite an affluent lifestyle and regular worldwide travel.

After pleading guilty to the evasion of Excise Duty he was jailed for six years for

Continued inside

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School places applications reminder

LANCASHIRE County Council is reminding parents with children due to start primary school in 2017 not to forget to put applying for school places on their Christmas list.

The closing date for applications is Sunday, January 15 and the quickest and easiest way to apply is online via the county council's website.

Parents need to submit an application form for all children starting school, even if the child already has an older brother or sister at their preferred school.

County Councillor Matthew Tomlinson, Lancashire's cabinet member for children, young people and schools, said: "Christmas is a busy time of year for many people, but I urge parents to remember to apply online for a primary school place for their child."

For more information visit the county council's website or call 01772 532191 or 01772 532190.

Pharmacies' bank holiday opening arrangements

THE NHS West Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) is reminding residents in the borough that local pharmacies can offer free, confidential and expert advice on a range of health issues if they fall ill over the Christmas and New Year bank holidays.

They can also help people to prepare for many common winter illnesses and offer advice on which medicines to keep in stock at home.

The CCG has issued the following list of pharmacies that will open over the bank holidays:

Fishlocks Chemist, 60 Liverpool Road North, Burscough, tel. 01704 894 391

Sunday, December 25 (Christmas Day) 10am to 1pm.

Monday, December 26 (Boxing Day) 11am to 4pm.

Tuesday, December 27 11am to 4pm.

Sunday, January 1 (New Year's Day) 8.30am to 9pm.

Monday, January 2 11am to 4pm.

Asda Pharmacy, Ingram, Skelmersdale, tel. 01695 567 010

Sunday, January 1 (New Year's Day) 11am to 5pm.

Morrisons In-store Pharmacy Park Road/Aughton Street, Ormskirk, tel. 01695 573 289

Monday, December 26 (Boxing Day) 10am to 4pm.

Tuesday, December 27 10am to 4pm.

Sunday, January 1 (New Year's Day) 10am to 4pm.

Monday, January 2 11am to 5pm.

All pharmacies will be open Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, however closing times may vary, so residents are advised to contact their nearest pharmacy for more information.

The local NHS in West Lancashire is backing the Examine your Options campaign, which aims to give people the right information they need, so that they know where to go to in the first instance, to get fast, expert advice when they need it and how to help themselves and their families if they have a common illness or ailment.

There are a number of services available to residents, which offer treatment and care this winter, such as walk-in centres, your local GP, NHS 111 service and the new free Patient Access website and smartphone app. However, at this time of the year, it is worth remembering that residents should only access A&E and dial 999 for life-threatening and serious conditions. To find your local NHS services, who can offer you the right care and treatment for your specific need, go to www.nhs.uk to use the free service finder.

Further information on all of the above services is available on the NHS West Lancashire CCG web site: www.westlancashireccg.nhs.uk.

For up-to-the-minute information on where to go if you fall ill during the bank holiday, visit the NHS West Lancashire CCG website: www.westlancashireccg.nhs.uk as well as their Twitter and Facebook pages, or visit Examine Your Options: www.examineyouroptions.info.

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Smuggling gang ringleader jailed for six years

From Page 1

his involvement in the cigarette smuggling ring and six years for his role in a second tobacco smuggling gang. Both sentences to run concurrently.

The other jailed gang members were Marc Feldman from Leeds, Michael McNally and John Wignal, both of Liverpool and Stephen Sheard from Crewe.

Fieldman, McNally and Wignal were all found guilty of the fraudulent evasion of Excise Duty and sentenced to 30 months jail, while Sheard was found guilty of two charges and was sentenced to three years jail per charge to run concurrently.

A sixth man, Adrian Davidson, of Leeds, was spared jailed after he admitted his part in the smuggling ring. He used an alias at a bank in Yeadon to transfer money to pay to shipping agents for the smuggled containers.

HMRC found £17,000 in cash hidden under his floorboards along with paperwork for visas and travel abroad for Hughes and others. Mobile phone evidence also connected him to Feldman.

The amount of Excise Duty evaded in this case is estimated at £10,199,650. HMRC have started confiscation proceedings to recover the stolen tax from gang members under Proceeds of Crime legislation.

County's one-way plan sparks safety fears

Report by **Henry James**

PROPOSALS by highways chiefs at Lancashire County Council to alter traffic flows in Cottage Lane and Halsall Lane in Ormskirk have raised fears about safety among people living in the area.

Residents say they only received consultation letters about the plans this week, although the letters were dated October 12. And they have only been given until January 9 to respond.

Joanne Burton, who lives in Halsall Lane, told the Champion: "The plans are quite complicated and we are concerned that people will not see the small one-way section on Cottage Lane. This will result in the re-direction of traffic up Halsall Lane and onto the Fiveways junction.

"Halsall Lane will become increasingly congested as it will become the only exit route. The road will have all the heavy and light traffic travelling up it, putting pedestrians - and especially children walking to school - at risk as they walk on the narrow pavement."

Now the residents' concerns have been taken up local independent group, Our West Lancashire (OWL) whose spokesman, Ian Davis, said: "The plans attached to the letter refer to a county council budget for 2014/15, so clearly they have been working on this for more than two years but are only giving residents three weeks or so to respond over the busy Christmas period.

"From a quick look at the proposals the full implications don't appear to have been thought through. For example, there is reference to accidents at Fiveways through right turns at the junction but it is not clear if those accidents relate to turning into Halsall Lane from County Road or turning right out of Halsall Lane and no one has yet provided the data.

Concerned residents of the Halsall Lane area who oppose the one-way section proposal on Cottage Lane

"That's crucial as the traffic flow changes being proposed would increase right turns out of Halsall Lane. Now is the time for residents who have concerns to make them known and ask the questions to which answers are required."

SOLUTIONS

A spokesman for Lancashire County Council commented: "We have written to residents about some possible solutions to traffic problems which have been a concern to people in this area for many years.

"We must stress that the plans being put forward are only a starting point for further discussion and we're asking people what they think of our proposals, and to put forward any alternatives.

"The scheme we've suggested involves managing traffic more closely by making Halsall Lane one-way in an easterly direction towards Fiveways junction, and introducing additional road markings and round-topped road humps on Cottage Lane and Asmall Lane to reinforce the existing 20mph limit.

"Our proposal is to also introduce dedicated parking bays and additional parking restrictions on Halsall Lane.

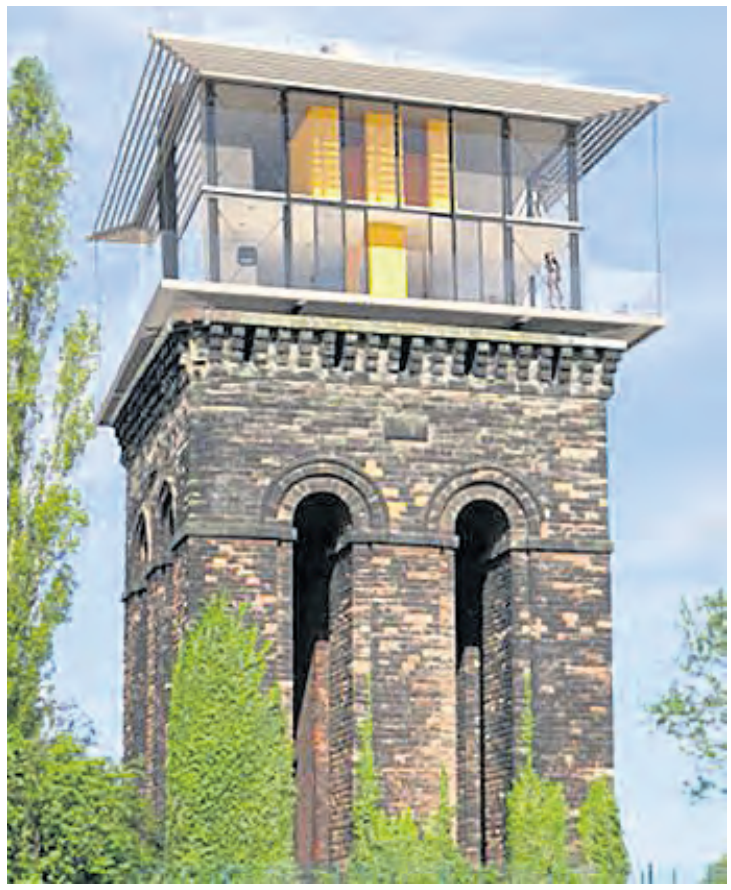
"A second option for discussion is introducing a short section of one-way system on Cottage Lane just south of Halsall Lane.

"The four-week consultation period till the January 9 was to give residents adequate time to consider the proposals and reply.

"The date on the consultation letter was a typographical error and should have read December 12 which was the first date the letter was anticipated to be delivered.

"Despite being checked before being sent out, this error was missed, and we can only apologise for the oversight."

The email address for residents to respond to with their comments is ormskirk.highway@lancashire.gov.uk.



An artist's image of the proposed development

Residents urged to have their say on water tower scheme

A BOROUGH councillor has expressed concerns that the latest proposal for refurbishment of the Water Tower on Tower Hill in Ormskirk could raise privacy and overlooking issues.

A Liverpool-based architect has submitted a planning application for a single residential dwelling on top of the existing tower where the water tank used to be situated.

Derby ward councillor Adrian Owens, who opposed an earlier proposal for seven flats at the site, said he was pleased that the latest application was not for flats but said he wanted local residents to be consulted on the plan.

He said: "This application seeks to increase the height of the Tower with extensive glazing and balconies on all four sides.

"I would expect that this could cause privacy and overlooking issues with Derby Ward residents and would like them to have the opportunity to respond to the consultation. Many households are not contacted directly by the Planning Department and will be unaware of the current application."

Cllr. Owens said that people who wanted to comment on the proposal must do so by Wednesday, January 4 to the borough council quoting ref: 2016/1136/FUL

Civic couple's festive fair date

DEPUTY Mayor of West Lancs, Councillor Neil Furey and his mayoress wife, Julie, joined members of the St Anne's Guides and Brownies at their Christmas Fair at St Anne's Pastoral Centre in Prescott Road, Ormskirk.

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County trading standards team launch age check campaign

A CAMPAIGN has been launched by Lancashire County Council Trading Standards Service to ensure retailers carry out age checks.

New resources, including posters, badges and training guides, have been sent to every pub, club and nightclub in the county to help them challenge anyone who looks under 25. Other recent campaigns have focused on retail tobacco sales.

County Councillor Azhar Ali, Lancashire's cabinet member for health and wellbeing, said: "We fully understand the challenges of retailing age-restricted products and our officers work hard to equip pubs, bars, nightclubs and shops with the resources to ensure their staff check people's age whenever they should.

"It's important that businesses get it right every single time and we want to help them. Check 25 exists to reduce negative impacts on health, crime and public nuisance, and protect children from harm."

Trading Standards is also encouraging young people to get a PASS (Proof of Age Standards Scheme) card to avoid the risk of losing their passport or driving licence on a night out and becoming victim to identity fraud. Officers are working with licensed premises to encourage them to accept the card as the key way to verify someone's age.

People can apply for a PASS card at www.pass-scheme.org.uk. There are a number of suppliers, with the average cost of a card being £15. Electronic versions of all the Check 25 resources can be downloaded at www.lancashire.gov.uk/lancan.

County Cllr. Azhar Ali

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Merseyrail set to get new trains by 2020

Report by **Henry James**

One of the new trains

NEW trains will be operating across the Merseyrail network, including Ormskirk, by the end of 2020 after Liverpool City Region leaders gave the green light to a £460m project.

Merseytravel say the 'state-of-the-art' trains will replace the near 40-year-old fleet that currently runs on the network – the oldest in the UK.

However, the new fleet will operate without traditional guards in a move that has angered union chiefs.

The National Union Of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) claim Merseytravel 'can't afford to run safe trains with guards, so it intends to run unsafe ones.'

The new trains will be operated differently, with the driver – assisted by cameras along the length of the train – responsible for the opening and closing of the doors and the dispatch, rather than the guard. This will mean the guard does not need to be on the trains, which the RMT union is against.

It is thought more than 200 guards jobs will go, although more than 60 new customer service roles, based on the trains will be created.

Merseytravel said 'Driver Controlled Operation' (DCO), was put forward by all bidders in meeting the recommendations of the Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB) report into the fatal incident at James Street in Liverpool in 2011.

Train drivers in the South of England have been on strike this month over plans to introduce DCO trains on the Southern railway network.

Merseytravel claim there would be no compulsory redundancies because of the new fleet. Reductions in posts, required to make the project affordable, are expected to be accommodated through redeployment, voluntary redundancies and retirements over the next four years, until the new trains are fully operational on the network.

Liam Robinson, chair of the Merseytravel Committee, said: "In an ideal world we'd like to have a second member of staff on every train to ensure the highest level of customer service, but there aren't the resources to do that. That is why, as the Merseytravel Committee, endorsed by the Combined Authority, we have sought guaranteed continued employment for all permanently employed guards and their managers who wish to stay at Merseyrail – something that we have had reassurance can be accommodated.

"Some guards will have the opportunity to be employed in a new on-board customer service role and others will be able to take advantage of other redeployment opportunities, all on the same terms and conditions as now."

The new trains will be built and maintained by Swiss manufacturer, Stadler, subject to a final legal process and the signing of the contracts in the New Year.

Merseytravel say they will be safer and easier to get on and off; will be able to carry 60 per cent more passengers while retaining the same number of seats and will cut journey times by 10 per cent - the equivalent of up to nine minutes on some end-to-end routes.

It is planned they willalso have the capabilities to eventually run beyond the current Merseyrail boundaries to places including Skelmersdale, Wrexham and Warrington.

The trains, which will not result in any additional fare increases or council tax rises, will be publicly-owned by Merseytravel..

The project took into account a number of factors including the increasing costs in maintaining a near 40-year-old fleet and the capacity pressures of a 2.5 per cent rise in passenger journeys every year.

The new trains project also includes infrastructure upgrades to power supplies, platforms and track.

Key features of the new trains include more space for bikes, buggies, disabled passengers and luggage; intelligent air conditioning; a bright, open and airy saloon, and a mix of seating types, keeping some of the 'sociable' facing seats.

The new trains will be easier to get on and off by reducing the 'gap' between the train and platform: a train body configured specifically for the network; lower train floors; platform and track improvements and a 'sliding step' from the train giving almost 'level access' in a first for the UK.

For on-board safety the train will be a 'safe space' forming one continuous space with no dividing doors. There will be CCTV with images broadcast within the train saloon and to the driver and control room and a direct link to the driver and control room.

The driver will be visible through a transparent cab door and on-board customer service staff will supplement other on-board staff and staffed stations.

There will be traffic light system door illuminations indicating when it's safe to get on and off and sensitive door edges that will detect 'the pull' from something as narrow as a tie or finger, stopping the train from moving or bringing it to a stop.

Wider aisles, larger doorway areas and many more grab handles will also make the trains easier to move around and safer for standing passengers.

MP visits 'outstanding' nursery to help dispel closure fears

Rosie Cooper with staff and youngsters at Moorgate Nursery.

ROSIE Cooper has met with the headteacher at Ormskirk's Moorgate Nursery School and Munchkins Childcare to help dispel fears about the future of the venue after Lancashire County Council's decision to close the adjoining Children's Centre and move services to the library.

The West Lancs MP and headteacher Nicola McDonagh were keen to emphasise that this decision does not affect the availability of nursery education provided by Moorgate Nursery school and the childcare places at Munchkins Childcare.

Moorgate Nursery has been providing education in the town since 1946 and will continue to do so.

Following her visit to the nursery, Rosie Cooper said: "Moorgate Nursery School provides outstanding learning and development for local children and I wanted to address this confusion about its future.

"This year Moorgate Nursery School has been rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted inspectors and I congratulate them on achieving the rating for a fourth consecutive inspection.

"It is important to use and protect the only local authority-maintained nursery school that we have here in Ormskirk to ensure local children and their families continue to benefit from attending Moorgate Nursery School.

"Having visited on several occasions as the borough's MP, I have witnessed for myself how much the children enjoy their time there.

"I know the headteacher has ambitious plans for the future to keep it growing and developing for the benefit of its children, families and the community.

"I would encourage parents who were unsure after hearing rumours about the future of Moorgate Nursery School to get in touch with the headteacher."

Nicola McDonagh added: "It was a pleasure to welcome Rosie Cooper to visit us again. I want to reassure parents that Moorgate Nursery School is continuing to provide a safe, fun and stimulating learning environment for our children."

Store's wonky carrots give-away

MORRISONS Ormskirk is giving away wonky carrots in an effort to support a Christmas tradition.

The move aims to introduce kids to wonky veg, encourage families to buy large or misshapen carrots, and help out busy parents who might otherwise forget to leave out refreshments for Father Christmas and his reindeers on Christmas Eve.

It follows new research amongst parents which reveals that leaving food and drink out for Santa and his reindeer is still a popular tradition for engaging kids with 6.2 million UK families expected to participate this Christmas Eve.

Manager at the Park Road store, Hannah Evans, said: "We want to make it easy for our customers to enjoy this magical tradition and highlight that wonky carrots are just as tasty as perfect-looking carrots."

Choir's carols treat for residents

RAIN certainly didn't dampen the spirits of pupils at Holy Trinity Primary School in Tarleton when they treated residents at a new homes development in the village to their very own private Christmas carol concert.

Housebuilder Barratt Homes invited the school choir to take part in festive fun at its canal-side Tarleton Lock development, located on Plox Brow where residents enjoyed mince pies and Christmas punch whilst listening to a medley of their favourite carols.

As a thank-you to the young choristers, Barratt will donate £150 to the school, and has also promised to invite pupils back for a VIP site visit in the spring.

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Mayor of West Lancashire,Councillor Liz Savage

Mayor's Christmas message

IN her Christmas message the Mayor of West Lancashire, Councillor Liz Savage, has spoken of how proud she is to serve the borough and the warm and friendly welcome she has received on her civic visits.

Wishing everyone in West Lancashire a joyful festive season, Cllr. Savage said: "My consort Councillor Noel Delaney and I are very grateful to the people of West Lancashire for inviting us to their wonderful events and celebrations.

"We are proud to serve West Lancashire and greatly appreciate the warm and friendly welcome we have received wherever we have visited.

""Noel and I have been privileged to see the very best of the West Lancashire community in our year so far, and we have felt humbled by the work that is done by so many of you on behalf of others.

"We have also been extremely grateful for the support we continue to receive to help the worthy causes we are raising money for this year. These are the Neo-Natal Unit at Ormskirk Hospital; the Artz Centre, Birch Green; The Civic in Ormskirk and the Birchwood Centre, Skelmersdale.

"May we wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year."

Council leader hails a year of 'notable successes'

WEST Lancs Council leader, Councillor Ian Moran has spoken of a year of "notable successes" and "ambitious" plans for the future in his Christmas message to the borough.

He said: "I would like to wish everyone a very happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

"I also want to thank council staff for their hard work over the last 12 months. Our employees are among our greatest assets and they deserve praise for the commitment they show to working for the people of West Lancashire.

"The council has achieved many notable successes in 2016. In May the council bought the Wheatsheaf Walks shops in Ormskirk for £3.01million. The purchase represents the council's largest-ever investment in retail property, and is enabling us to bring more business to the town.

"The Ormskirk MotorFest in August proved once again to be a huge success with about 30,000 people coming to enjoy this magnificent spectacle, making it one of the biggest free family events in the North West.

Councillor Ian Moran, leader of West Lancashire Borough Council

Challenges

"In the autumn the council completed the £8 million Firbeck Revival Project, which will benefit tenants for many years to come. Existing homes had many improvements, and 42 new council homes were built to meet the needs of modern families.

"The £1.7 million Greenwood Business Centre officially opened and the high quality industrial units help to meet demand for such premises in the business community.

"In 2017 the council will face financial challenges, like many other local authorities across the UK. The council manages its budgets effectively to ensure the authority provides excellent value for money, and in previous years we have made savings while minimising any effects on services, but now these options are more difficult to find.

"However, the council will continue to be ambitious for the borough, ambitious for its people, businesses and places and continue to strive towards achieving the goals in the Council Plan.

"Working with our partners St Modwen and the Homes and Communities Agency, the council can make progress on the Skelmersdale town centre regeneration project.

"The council will continue to work with our partners on the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy, which aims to ensure the town has an even more vibrant and successful future.

"The council hopes that progress will also be made on the Moor Street Gateway Project which aims to regenerate the area around Ormskirk Bus Station.

"The launch of the Skelmersdale branding, which aims to promote the fantastic opportunities Skelmersdale offers as a place to live, work and do business, was extremely well received. The council will continue to encourage businesses to join the Skelmersdale Ambassadors Network to help show the world everything Skelmersdale is rightly proud of.

"Christmas is a joyful time for a lot of us, but I would ask people West Lancashire to spare a thought for those who may need a helping hand over the festive period."

Primary pupils get top marks from county schools chief

PRIMARY pupils in Lancashire have been praised by the county council's schools chief after excelling in national tests.

County Councillor Matthew Tomlinson, the cabinet member for children, young people and schools, said: "Once again, the Key Stage 2 results are really pleasing.

"Our primary school children are doing well, with results above the national and regional average in the key areas of reading, writing and maths, which is definitely something we can be proud of.

"This shows what excellent work our schools are doing throughout the county. They have obviously got to grips with a new and more demanding curriculum, and it is great to see Lancashire children performing so well.

"This is backed up by the latest Ofsted figures showing that 95% of Lancashire's primary age pupils attend schools that have been judged to be good or outstanding, compared to the national average of 90%, and the North West average of 93%.

"Well done to all our children, and to their teachers, parents, and school governors.

"These results are a compliment to all their hard work.

"Lancashire County Council staff support almost all of our primary schools and it is great to know that they are helping them to build such strong foundations for when pupils move on to secondary school."

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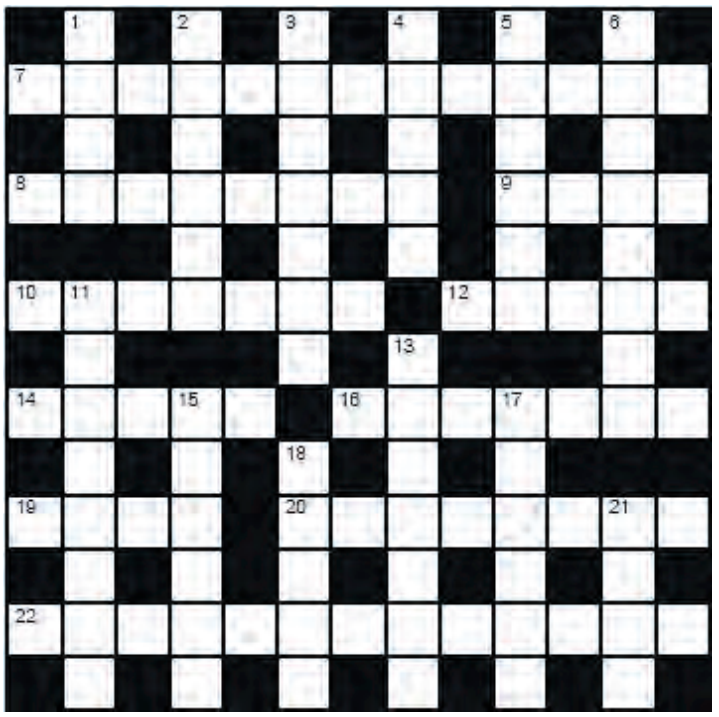

Last week's solutions:

Across: 7 Female. 8 Quorum. 9 Ammo. 10 Stage set. 11 Oratory. 13 Tempt. 15 Balmy. 17 Persist. 20 Gourmand. 21 Peep. 22 Heroin. 23 Nephew.

Down: 1 Reamer. 2 Taco. 3 Measure. 4 Squab. 5 Homeless. 6 Tune up. 12 Tomorrow. 14 Pending. 16 Apogee. 18 Sweden. 19 Jaunt. 21. Pope.

ACROSS

7 Large box filled with valuables (8,5)
8 The highest heaven (8)
9 Mountain lake (4)
10 Football club who play at Goodison Park (7)
12 The Mountain Ash tree (5)
14 Short written composition (5)
16 Conveyor (7)
19 The sediment of wine in the barrel, dregs (4)
20 Unconsciousness or incapacity resulting from a cerebral haemorrhage or stroke (8)
22 Your son's wife (8-2-3)

DOWN

1 Electric passenger vehicle powered by overhead cables (4)
2 Legal practitioner (6)
3 Pub machine that plays records when money is inserted (7)
4 River that flows through Paris (5)
5 Slum area of a city (6)
6 Identification word a person needs to log on to a computer system (8)
11 Relating to inward feelings rather than conscious reasoning (8)
13 (Of food) Salty not sweet (7)
15 Allocate a job or duty (6)
17 Ease up (6)
18 Unpleasant (5)
21 Photographic or digital image taken of the body in hospital (1-3)

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Incentives offered to woo festive shoppers

Council hope parking deal and extra market will attract more Christmas visitors to Ormskirk

WEST Lancs Council chiefs are aiming to attract Christmas shoppers to Ormskirk by offering a festive parking offer and an extra Christmas market.

In the run-up to Christmas the council has organised for the usual Ormskirk market stalls to operate today (Wednesday, December 21) to give shoppers an extra opportunity to buy gifts and festive essentials.

Normal operating hours for the market are 8am to 4pm but shoppers should be aware that the market may finish early on Christmas Eve (Saturday, December 24) and New Year's Eve (Saturday, December 31).

In addition, right up until Christmas Eve shoppers can save money when using the council's car parks in Ormskirk. Visitors who buy a pay-and-display ticket will receive an additional two hours' free parking.

This special offer applies only to council-controlled pay-and-display car parks and does not extend to the privately-owned and operated Two Saints Retail Park car park.

Motorists should ensure they read car park signage, and a valid paid-for parking ticket must be displayed to take advantage of the offer. Any parking tickets issued free of charge do not qualify for the additional two hours' free parking.

Councillor John Hodson, whose cabinet portfolio responsibilities include the market, said: "This excellent festive parking offer shows once again how the council offers really good value for money. When combined with the extra market, it helps to make Ormskirk a great place to come this festive season. So make sure you come into town to do your Christmas shopping, and also enjoy one of the many coffee shops, restaurants and bars that the town has to offer."

Motorists should note that the two extra free hours will not be shown on the pay-and-display parking ticket purchased from a machine on a council-controlled car park. So, for example, if you buy a ticket at 10am for one hour's parking the ticket will still show an expiry time of 11am. But, during the special offer period, you will be able to park until 1pm.

Notices explaining the offer will be on display at the council-controlled car parks. All car park attendants are aware of the offer and will allow for the extra two hours after the indicated ticket expiry time.

Borough council chiefs hope that the parking offer and extra market incentive will bring more visitors to Ormskirk over the festive period

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Martin Mere news

WWT Martin Mere Wetland Centre is hosting special Floodlit Swan Evenings every Tuesday night in January from the 10th until 24th. Floodlit Swan Evenings are a great opportunity to be on site afterhours, meet the wardens and see large numbers of swans by floodlight.

During the evening you will learn all about the swans including their migration route, why they come to Martin Mere, the research we undertake and what we have learnt over the last 20 years.

Reserve Manager, Tom Clare, said: "Each swan is individual and has a unique bill pattern, similar to how humans have fingerprints as well as many of them having a ring around either their left (female) or right (male) leg which makes them very easy to identify. From this research we have been able to build up family trees, learn divorce rate in swans and get accurate information as to where they spend the summer. It is absolutely fascinating to get to know the swans on a personal level and it is exciting when you spot a swan with a ring on its leg as you know you can find out all about it. Evenings like floodlit swans means you can come along and learn about the swans in a lot more detail."

You must book in advance to come along to a floodlit swan evening by calling 01704 895181. The cost for an adult is: £9.73 and a concession is: £7.11. The evenings start at 6.30pm and last until approximately 8pm.

In other news at the centre, the Christmas holidays will soon be upon us and the centre is continuing with the swan theme by introducing a swan booklet that highlights 8 of our ringed swans for visitors to go out and search for, as well as a swan pipe in the exhibition hall for visitors to walk through a swan catch as a swan – take measurements, create your own ring and then be released back into the grounds to search for our 14 GIANT celebrity designed Dusty Ducks.

WWT Martin Mere Wetland Centre is open every day (except Christmas Day) from 9.30am to 4.30pm during winter months and parking is free of charge. Situated off the A59, it is signposted from the M61, M58 and M6. The Centre is also accessible via the Southport to Manchester and the Liverpool to Preston line by train from Burscough Rail Stations. Visit the web site http://www.wwt.org.uk/martinmere/ to find out what's on all year round at Martin Mere and the other eight WWT Wetland Centres.

Visit the web site www.wwt.org.uk/martinmere to find out what's on the reserve at the moment as well as all the upcoming events

Wealth fund a 'bribe' to accept fracking says borough MP

ROSIE Cooper had made a formal submission to the Shale Wealth Fund consultation being run by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, confirming her opposition to fracking being forced upon communities in Lancashire.

The West Lancs MP has consistently opposed plans for fracking in the county which could include areas of West Lancashire following recent exploratory work in the Downholland and Haskayne areas.

The government announced plans to create a Shale Wealth Fund, initially comprising up to 10% of the tax revenues received from shale gas production, to benefit communities where shale gas sites are located.

The consultation aims to seek views from stakeholders on the priorities of the Shale Wealth Fund and the most appropriate delivery method, in particular looking at how funds should be allocated.

Consequences

However, Ms Cooper remains opposed to any fracking activity and described the fund as a bid to "bribe" communities.

Speaking about her consultation submission, she said: "When this government overruled Lancashire County Council's rejection of fracking they killed any credibility of their localism agenda.

"They are imposing the consequences of fracking on to local communities. All this Shale Wealth Fund offers are bribes and inducements to communities for the greater cost they will have to bear. I wanted to use this consultation to once again reiterate how the people of West Lancashire opposing fracking wanted to be heard, not silenced with financial inducements."

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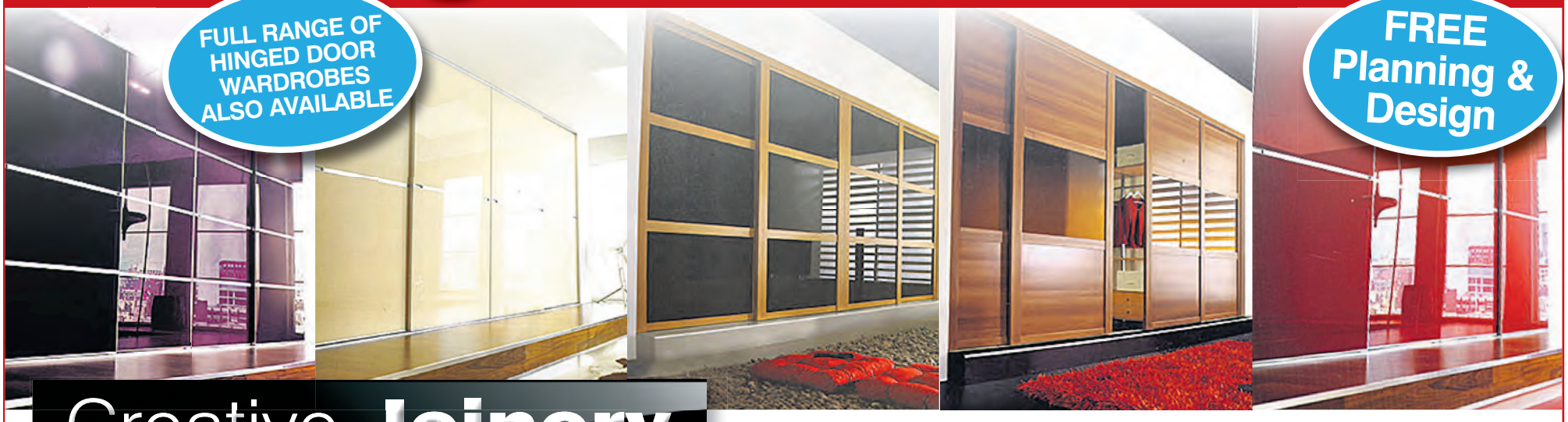

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County bid to tackle loneliness and social isolation

New report offers guidance on combatting issues estimated to cost Lancs health services £200m a year

LANCASHIRE County Council has launched a report, Hidden From View, and guidelines aimed at helping to tackle loneliness and social isolation in the county.

The move follows research showing that the two issues can impact hugely on wellbeing and can have a similar effect on a person's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Also, it is estimated that the cost of dealing with those effects can cost the NHS and social care system in Lancashire up to £200m annually..

The report aims to give guidance on how partner organisations can work together effectively to tackle social isolation and loneliness.

Ways of identifying people who may be lonely or isolated, which parts of Lancashire and which people are most affected, and what sort of activities can best address the two issues are among topics covered in the report.

County Councillor Azhar Ali, Lancashire's cabinet member for health and wellbeing, said: "Tackling loneliness and isolation is absolutely crucial. Around 35,000 older people in Lancashire are classed as lonely, so it's a huge issue for us and all the organisations involved in health and social care in the county.

County Councillor Azhar Ali

"There is already a lot of good work being done, but *Hidden from View* will help to build on this and suggest different measures which can be put in place to help to more quickly identify people who are isolated or lonely."

The *Hidden from View* report was produced following in-depth research about people suffering from loneliness and isolation in Lancashire, and the effectiveness of work being done to address the issue.

Dr Sakthi Karunanithi, director of public health for Lancashire County Council, added: "Loneliness and isolation are two separate issues. Not everyone who is isolated and spends most of their time alone is lonely, but they may become lonely. On the flip-side, not everyone feeling lonely is isolated from their friends, family or community.

"There are triggers that can lead to loneliness, such as the loss of a friend or loved one, illness or disability, or the loss of a driving licence. This report will help people identify these issues more effectively.

"We've recommended a new approach where professionals can make the most of these opportunities and put people in touch with someone who can help. These measures won't cost much time and money to put in place but they'll make a huge difference."

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County police chief launches consultation on council tax precept

LANCASHIRE'S police and crime commissioner has launched a public consultation on the council tax police precept by calling on the Government to stop "conning" the public over funding.

Clive Grunshaw's plea follows the announcement of the latest government financial settlement for PCCs to fund their services which shows a grant reduction of £3.5m.

Policing minister, Brandon Lewis, revealed next year's funding allocation will fall by an additional £2.5m on top of the £1m it reduced last year.

Mr Grunshaw is responsible for setting the budget for the police and for deciding the amount of council tax (known as the precept) the public in Lancashire pay towards it. Lancashire Police receives more than 70% of its funding through central government and 26% via the council tax precept.

The commissioner said: "The Government needs to start telling it like it is. In Lancashire we have had to save £76m a year and we have significant savings to find by 2020. This settlement confirms that. But the Government claims it is 'protecting' police funding. It's just not true."

The commissioner added: "We are beginning to see a rise in crime in our area along with rising demand as health services and councils are scaled back due to their funding issues. Despite this, Lancashire Police will continue to manage these new cuts effectively and provide a quality service.

"With this in mind, I am launching the consultation on the council tax precept and would urge as many people as possible to have their say. I will act on the outcome of the consultation regardless of what the Government may be asking me to do."

In the consultation members of the public will be asked if they want to freeze the payment at current levels; increase it by 2% (an average of 6p per week); or increase it by 5% (an average of 16p per week).

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Think before you dial 999

Ambulance service plea to festive revellers: Don't go crazy on 'Mad Friday'

AMUBULANCE chiefs are urging party-goers to drink responsibly during the festive season and to think before they dial 999 so that paramedics are able to deal with life-threatening incidents.

On the Friday before Christmas – known as 'Mad Friday' - the North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) is expecting a spike in emergency calls as the Christmas party season goes into over-drive.

Emergency medical dispatchers, who answer emergency 999 calls to the ambulance service, answer almost 4,000 calls every day. However, 'Mad Friday' is expected to present them with further challenges, many of which could be prevented if people were to take sensible precautions.

Recent examples of frivolous 999 calls include:

- A call made by a patient who had banged their knee. At the same time, an ambulance crew rushed to a patient gasping for breath.
- A person who'd noticed a lump on his bottom. One minute later, NWAS were called to a male who was found unresponsive on the floor.
- A call by a man who had hurt his ankle the day before. Shortly after, a call came in for a patient with difficulty breathing.
- A call from a patient who had injured their ankle playing football. At the same time, NWAS was also called to a one-year-old baby suffering breathing difficulties due to an allergic reaction.

In these instances although ambulances were not sent to the first set of calls, they did hold up the line for serious emergencies where time can mean the difference between life and death.

NWAS director of operations, Ged Blezard, said: "The service is incredibly busy and we don't have spare paramedics and ambulances to deal with the extra calls which occasions such as Mad Friday present us with. We need people to take some responsibility for their own safety during this busy period.

"In genuine life-threatening emergencies, time matters. If people stop and think about their actions and try not to have one too many during the festive period, they can help us to get to the vulnerable and very poorly people that really need us – it could be one of their relatives relying on us.

"It is also important to remember hangovers, headaches and feeling under the weather after a night out can generally be treated using medicine from your local pharmacist and getting plenty of rest and fluid."

Call to put food safety and savings on the Christmas menu

RESIDENTS in West Lancashire are being urged to save money on festive meals and be safe with food this Christmas.

Family feasts are popular during the festive season, but with large amounts of food being prepared over a short period, it's important to avoid wasting food or worse still, a Christmas case of food poisoning.

While 43% of people feel that buying presents is by far the biggest worry at Christmas, cooking Christmas dinner comes second.

According to Love Food Hate Waste, wasting food costs the average UK household £470 a year. With 29% of people preparing Christmas dinner for more than seven guests, it's easy not to think of unnecessary food waste over the festive season.

But West Lancs Council has teamed up with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to encourage people to freeze leftover food during the festive season. By planning ahead, it's possible to do some Christmas cooking in advance of the big day and put that into the freezer.

Foods can be frozen right up to the use-by date. While food is kept safe in the freezer, it's the quality that deteriorates over time, so the FSA recommends eating any leftover food within three to six months and checking for any freezing instructions on the packaging.

Food should be defrosted when it is needed and eaten within 24 hours of it being fully defrosted.

Councillor Kevin Wright, the council's portfolio holder for health, said: "The Christmas period can provide challenges when it comes to avoiding food poisoning and avoiding wasting food. Cooking for a greater number of people can mean having to handle different defrosting and cooking times and ensuring that large amounts of food are stored safely. You also have to ensure that any leftovers are still safe to eat, all while reducing unnecessary food waste."

To help reduce the risk of food-borne illness over the festive period, the council and the FSA recommend the following tips:

Cold temperatures slow the growth of germs so make sure your fridge is running at the correct temperature - below 5°C - and is not overcrowded.

To prevent cross-contamination, ensure that you store raw turkey (and other raw foods) separately from cooked or ready-to- eat food, covered and chilled on the bottom shelf of the fridge.

If you are using a frozen turkey, make sure you check how long it will take to defrost safely using the turkey packaging instructions or at www.food.gov.uk/christmas

To prevent the spread of food poisoning germs like campylobacter, make sure that you wash everything that has touched your raw turkey (e.g. hands, utensils and work surfaces) with soap and hot water.

Don't wash your raw turkey under the tap as this can splash germs around your kitchen.

Check the turkey is cooked thoroughly - there should be no pink meat in the thickest parts and it should be steaming hot with juices running clear.

If you've got leftovers, you should cool them, cover and ensure that they go in the fridge or freezer within one or two hours. If you have a lot of one type of food, splitting it into smaller portions will help it to cool quicker.

Make sure that when you come to use frozen leftovers, you defrost them thoroughly in the fridge overnight or in a microwave (on defrost setting) and then re-heat until steaming hot.

MP Rosie Cooper and the Mayor of West Lancs, Councillor Liz Savage and her consort Councillor Noel Delaney were among the guests at a carol service in aid of Marie Curie Cancer Care held at Lathom Park Chapel. They are pictured here with Reverend Sarah O'Donoghue, Reverend Sylvia Draper and organiser Eunice Woof.

Police appeal after woman is knocked unconscious by robber

POLICE are appealing for information after a woman was knocked unconscious and left "extremely shaken" in an assault and robbery in the early hours of Sunday, December 11.

The incident occurred at around 1.30am after the 52-year-old got out of a taxi in Woodvale Court, Banks following a night out.

As she was looking for her house keys she was hit from behind and knocked to the floor. She was then kicked or punched and lost consciousness.

The offender made off with around £40 in cash.

Police are now urging anybody who saw the incident, or has any information about it, to contact them as soon as possible.

PC Sarah Dawber, of Chorley Police, said: "This was a vicious attack which has left the victim bruised and extremely shaken, all for the sake of £40. We would urge anybody who saw what happened, or who saw anything suspicious in the area at around the time, to contact us immediately."

Anybody with information is asked to contact police on 101.

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Union might be over-playing the 'safety card' but I'd be happier having guards on night-time trains

FIRST, I wish every reader a really splendid Christmas. And I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those folk who wished me well following my heart attack.

The number of people who approached me in the street or supermarket, many of whom I didn't know, was heart warming and humbling. Thank you all.

But back to business.

The recent and continuing strikes of conductors and now drivers on Southern trains must really be spoiling many Christmases down there. I don't want to come down firmly on anyone's side. I thought ASLEF General Secretary Mick Whelan came across as a thoughtful and sensible man in a TV interview I saw yesterday.

But having said that, I find it difficult to see his point about operating driver only trains (DOO). He claims these will be unsafe because the driver (at one end of a long train) is expected to ensure it is safe to close the train doors.

What he could not really answer though was why there should be all this safety fuss now when DOO trains are already operating in many parts of the country, including (by another operator) over some of the lines and using similar trains equipped with state-of-the-art CCTV, that he claims are unsuitable for this innovation.

Personally, I think the main reason I don't like the idea of the driver being the only official on board is also one of safety. But not because the driver is shutting the doors - it's who he is shutting them on that rather bothers me.

As things stand, around where I live trains all have guards (or conductors, or whatever they are called these days) and yet I am just a tad uneasy travelling on a local train in the late evening. Should any kind of trouble start, it is comforting to know there is at least one representative of officialdom on hand.

Mind you, having said that I was impressed by Mick Whelan, I did feel he was being a little economical with the truth. He said the strikes were all about safety, not money. But he then said that the refusal of drivers to do overtime showed the company was under-staffed when it relied on overtime to provide a proper service.

I agree. But I'd bet a pound to a pay rise that if Southern were to train up more drivers, so getting rid of the need for drivers to agree to overtime, that it would lead very quickly to a demand for an increase in their basic rate to compensate them for not having overtime money!

From the sounds of everything going on down on the Southern at the moment, I'd say the company is hardly a model employer. But ASLEF at the moment is trying it on, playing the 'safety card'for all it's worth.

Talking of railways, I have been watching re-runs of Chris Tarrant's excellent series Extreme Railway Journeys throughout the world. Just last night he was in India (which must have had more railway programmes dedicated to it than any other country)

Whatever, I enjoy this series immensely, as much for the folk Chris meets en-route as the trains themselves. But something struck me last night. Something that we in this country have been schooled about for a few years now.

We are told that it's Mumbai now, NOT Bombay. Yet in this (comparatively recent) programme, there was a prominently displayed 'Bombay' station platform sign.

Then, Chris was talking to an Indian lorry driver who was using the railway's Ro-Ro (roll on, roll off) service rather than the crowded and uncertain roads. And this chap told him he was using the train to get from Bombay to Mangalore. Strange old world, isn't it?

I sometimes wonder whether politically correct folk are more worried about the people they think they are defending, or their own self-righteous consciences.

Still, whether you live in Bombay, Mumbai or rather closer to home, a Very Merry Christmas to you all!

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Companies urged to apply for share of rural business fund

RURAL companies in Lancashire are being encouraged to apply for a share of £3.8m to grow their business.

Lancashire County Council has announced the funding as the next stage of the Lancashire LEADER programme 2015-2020.

The funding can support a range of activities such as business development, farming, rural services, culture and heritage, and forestry. And it can be used for a variety of different uses such as buying equipment and business expansion, as long as projects involve business growth, job creation or both.

Leader of Lancashire County Council, County Councillor Jennifer Mein, said: "We're calling on rural businesses and groups to apply for this funding that will help them to create new jobs and boost the local economy.

"The current round of funding closes towards the end of January, so people are encouraged to apply straight away."

County Councillor Marcus Johnstone, cabinet member for environment, planning and cultural services, added: "We're particularly pleased that this year's funding could support cultural and heritage projects, and the provision of rural services for local people.

"The LEADER programme encourages the involvement of local rural communities. Decisions on which projects to fund are taken by local representatives from businesses, the public and community organisations. Their knowledge and expertise is used to decide how funding is allocated in their area."

One company which has previously received support is Hollin House Green Farm in Aughton.

Margaret Webster from Hollin House Green Farm said: "We've supplied dirty potatoes to the crisping industry for many years and in more recent times their specifications have changed to wanting the crop washed, so that the factories don't have a disposal cost for the soil and dirt.

"We applied for LEADER funding in the spring, were successful and in September we installed our potato washing system.

"This new washing system enables us to meet the ever-demanding specifications of our customers and offers us greater opportunities to supply more outlets.

""My advice to anyone considering applying is to talk to the project officers. It will be worth it in the end, as up to 40% grant aid is a significant proportion of your project costs, especially in the current economic climate"

Other companies which have received this funding in the past year include FB Eminson & Son and Lovania Nurseries, both in Tarleton.

To find out more about the funding contact Karen Lawrenson on 01772 538797 or Louise Kite on 01772 534134, or email ruralfunding@lancashire.gov.uk.

Baby and child remembrance service held at hospital

A BABY and child remembrance service at Ormskirk Hospital was attended by more than 60 people.

Members of the Salvation Army band provided music for the informal service which was led by Reverend Martin Abrams, the chaplain of Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust.

Reverend Abrams said: "The run-up to Christmas can be a very exciting and special time but it can also heighten a sense of loss, grief and isolation.

"We first held this event last year. It is a much appreciated and moving event for those who take part. Many had suffered a child or baby loss at some time the past."

Attendees also wrote the names of loved ones on baubles to hang from the Christmas tree in the garden where the service was held.

Trees of Remembrance are also available in the prayer and quiet rooms at both Southport and Ormskirk hospitals during December.

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Champion LETTERS to the Editor

Clare House, 166 Lord Street, Southport PR9 0QA
tel 01704 392 400 email editor@champnews.com

Blood donors have given me back my quality of life

RE: The article headed 'Call to give blood this Christmas' (Champion, December 7) 18 months ago I was shocked to receive a diagnosis of myelodysplasia (MDS) a blood cancer.

As far as I was concerned I was a pretty fit 72-year-old woman who didn't smoke or drink and wasn't overweight.

It took a lot of coming to terms with for me and my husband.

What made it more difficult was the hospital couldn't give me any idea of how long I had left.

I became anaemic which made me tired and breathless and I was put on monthly blood transfusions which made a dramatic difference to my life.

I was able to live again - a normal life like I had before. Shopping, enjoying having tea out, doing my housework!

And it was all due to people who cared enough about others like me to give their time and blood to make my life better.

Effort

I was a blood donor for many years when I was younger. I understand now that donors have to make the effort to go to the unit to donate blood which is very inconvenient for a lot of people – especially those who work.

Towards the end of the month I become very anaemic again which makes me breathless and unable to do much, but once I have my transfusion I get my life back again.

Without the people who give blood, we would have absolutely no quality of life, so I just wanted to say a heartfelt thank-you to all donors and let them know that the people I sit with in the oncology unit are truly grateful for their support.

I also want to thank the staff at the Southport Hospital oncology ward who work so hard to look after us.

Grateful, Mawdesley
(Name & address supplied)

More houses for Skem? How about the facilities to go with them?

IN reply to A.D. (Letters, December 7) about more homes in Skelmersdale, yes, there is land for houses but that's the problem - we get more houses but not facilities to go with them!

No new schools or parks, and the parking for the present primary schools we have is ridiculous.

Living near Cobbs Brow school and trying to get out of your own street is a nightmare.

Think about these problems when you are advocating dumping yet more problems on a once lovely town where at present we can't even get roads swept or bushes and trees cut, never mind getting pavements repaired.

Carole Huxley,
Manfield, Skelmersdale

PICTURE of the week

Trudging to work - it's countdown to Christmas for Santa as he gets on the move for his busiest night of the year.
Picture by Martyn Snape.

Students not to blame for town centre's demise

WHILE I agree with Dave Driver (Letters, December 14) that Ormskirk town centre is floundering, I don't think he has identified the real cause of our problems. It is surely significant that in too many cases it is the high levels of rental imposed by landlords, mostly located outside Ormskirk, that is forcing businesses to close.

Until these landlords appreciate this fact, the town centre will continue to die.

It has become all too easy to blame students for the present state of affairs.

Apart from the fact that they bring business to Omskirk, it is significant that Loughborough, a market town comparable in size to Omskirk and also with a large student population, continues to thrive.

Murray Steele,
Chestnut Court, Ormskirk

A point of clarity on HMOs and council tax

A POINT of clarity on the letter in the Champion (December 7) regarding houses of multiple occupancy.

HMOs refer to all houses of multiple occupancy, on which council tax is most definitely payable.

However, full-time students are disregarded for council tax.

It follows that if you live in a HMO but are not a full-time student, council tax is payable.

Often this is paid by the landlord and recovered from the tenant via a proportion of the rent.

This is an important point, as the letter is misleading to those non-student tenants in HMOs who are being charged for council tax by their landlords.

Barbara Bunn, by email

Drop us a line...

■ IF you've got a view on a topic of local or national interest which you would like to share with the readers of the Champion, why not drop us a line?

Letters to the editor should be concise, preferably no more than 350 words, and should include the sender's name, address and contact details, although not necessarily for publication.

The editor reserves the right to edit all items submitted for favour of publication.

Correspondents preferring not to have their name and/or their address published may provide a suitable nom de plume.

Letters can be posted or emailed to the respective addresses listed at the top of this page.

PLEASE note: All views and opinions expressed in letters to the editor are solely those of the authors and are NOT necessarily endorsed or advocated in any way by Champion Newspapers.

Funding and staffing a greater priority for hospital patients than state of Christmas tree

WHAT a rarefied and cosseted life Cheryl Finch must lead if she is able to dedicate so much of her time to pondering the aesthetic virtue of Ormskirk Hospital's Christmas tree (Letters, December 7).

I may be something of an eccentric, but I would have thought that the most prudent way to improve the stay of people in hospital over the festive period would be to provide the NHS with adequate funding and staffing.

The presence of a decorated tree situated outside the hospital's main entrance would be relatively low on my list of priorities.

I am sorry that Cheryl chose to view the condition of the hospital's tree as a personal slight. In order to soothe her delicate disposition perhaps the hospital staff should all wear Christmas jumpers and distribute mince pies and mulled wine, the next time she visits.

After all, she does pay her council tax.

M. J. Black, by email

Support your local Christingle services and help raise money for The Children's Society

WITH Christmas fast approaching many people across Lancashire are getting into the festive spirit, getting out the tinsel, enjoying the mince pies and celebrating with the family.

For me Christmas is a time of such blessing but it also offers a chance to remember those who are less fortunate, children and young people whose voices aren't being listened to and whose problems are being ignored.

That's why I'm supporting The Children's Society's Christingle celebrations, as money raised will go to support children and young people in this country who are suffering from terrible hardship, abuse and neglect.

Last year there were dozens of wonderfully joyous and welcoming Christingle services in Lancashire and this year it looks like there will be even more.

So we need as many people as possible to go along, enjoy themselves and donate to support the thousands of children and young people who are in desperate need.

To find out about a local Christingle near you visit childrenssociety.org.uk/local .

June Brown, MBE, actress

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Pantomime 'took me back to the days of the music hall'

Review by **Ron Ellis**

Jack & The Beanstalk
Southport Dramatic Club
Little Theatre
Runs until Jan 8

THIS pantomime might have been called The Paul Wilkinson Show.

Not only did the multi-talented actor write the script, design the posters and direct the show, in his role as Dame Beetroot he was the top of the bill, onstage for the great majority of the night doing a stand-up comedy act with excruciatingly corny jokes, possibly in the hope he might become the next Ken Dodd. ('The Beatles once played in this theatre. The audience went wild. They'd never seen four Scousers working before.').

John Delahunty did a fine job as assistant director and thanks to the radio mikes, every word could be heard throughout the packed auditorium.

James Henderson was Jack, who sang an excellent rendition of This Is The moment from Jekyll & Hyde, and Layla Carlin played Alice who joined up with a chorus of five glamorous dancers to perform a spirited version of Bonnie Tyler's Holding Out For A Hero.

Matty Higginson, as Morris Dancer, led the dancers in an entertaining and lively version of Morris dancing while SDC stalwart, Brendan Gillow, lent an air of authority to the proceedings as Squire Fitzloosley and a Harry Gascoigne enjoyed a great rapport with the audience as Simple Simon.

Charley Webster was Fairy Moonbeam and the wicked witch, Arachnia, was played by a snarling Liz Crooke. The two police officers, Bailey and Barnpot, were Jack Chapman and Sophie Wright.

The cast of Jack and the Beanstalk

One of the highlights of the show was musical director, Chris Rimmer, jumping onstage to sing, and giving a very professional performance backed by an excellent live band who had toes tapping throughout the theatre with songs like The Foundations' Build Me Up Buttercup (the cow was called Buttercup!), Barry White's You're The First, The Last, My Everything and The Rolling Stones' Paint It Black which featured a troupe of energetic black-clad dancers. For some reason, details of the band and the numbers they performed were missing from the programme.

The dancing, by a large cast of young people, was first class throughout, a tribute to choreographer Zoe Findlay, and whoever chose the colourful costumes should be running a fashion house.

Strangely, the evening seemed rather like a live performance of The Good Old Days. Only at odd moments, like the inevitable 'there's a ghost behind you' sketch, I was reminded that this was a pantomime not a variety show.

And only one young girl was invited to come up onstage (Caitlin, the night I went and very confident she was) but Dame Beetroot did finally get the audience to join in for a brief sing-along with the audience ('my side is better than your side') before the Grand Finale and curtain time.

Star rating 7 out of 10. Took me back to the days of music hall.

The Thrill of Love coming to Little Theatre

Formby Little Theatre opens the New Year with Amanda Whittington's The Thrill of Love, the dramatic tale of a woman who had too much excitement in her life.

Ruth Ellis was the last woman to be hanged for murder in the UK and the repercussions still continue today, which is now over 60 years after her death.

This gripping play, by the writer of Ladies Day and Be my Baby, depicts the events that led up to Ellis's inevitable ending.

Detective Inspector, Jack Gale, who investigates the case, shares all the misgivings and suspicions voiced by so many at that time. Why was she so determined to own up?

The Thrill of Love runs from Tuesday, January 10 to Saturday, January 14 and Tuesday, January 17 to Saturday January 21.

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Sunday 25th LUNCH: Pre booked parties only EVENING: Closed
Monday 26th LUNCH: Pre booked parties only EVENING: Closed
Tuesday 27th LUNCH: 12-2.30 EVENING: 5-9.00
Wednesday 28th LUNCH: 12-2.30 EVENING: 5-9.00
Thursday 29th LUNCH: 12-2.30 EVENING: 5-9.00
Friday 30th LUNCH: 12-2.30 EVENING: 5-9.00
Saturday 31st LUNCH: 12-2.30 EVENING: Pre-booked parties only
Sunday 1st LUNCH: CLOSED EVENING: CLOSED
Monday 2nd LUNCH: CLOSED EVENING: CLOSED
Tuesday 3rd LUNCH: CLOSED EVENING: CLOSED
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Christmas Deadlines

Due to the Christmas and Boxing Day Bank Holidays, the booking deadline for Private Advertisements is as follows:

For publication **Wednesday 28th Dec**
DEADLINE **5pm Thursday 22nd Dec**

Wishing all our readers a very Merry Christmas

Entertainments

The gift of entertainment this Christmas!

JANUARY
SAT 21st
MACCA - THE CONCERT
Celebrating the music of Paul McCartney

THU 26th
PSYCHIC SALLY
CALL ME PSYCHIC

FRI 27th-SAT 28th
THRILLER LIVE
Featuring the songs of MICHAEL and the JACKSON 5

FEBRUARY
SUN 5th
NATHAN CARTER

WED 8th
ROUND THE HORNE
The 50th Anniversary Tour

THU 9th
An Evening with AGGERS & TUFFERS

FRI 10th
SMOKIE

SAT 11th
YOU WIN AGAIN
The Story of the Bee Gees

MON 13th - SAT 18th
WILLY RUSSELL'S BLOOD BROTHERS
'Unmissable and unbeatable' The Spectator

SUN 19th
JIMMY CARR
THE BEST OF, ULTIMATE, GOLD, GREATEST HITS TOUR

TUE 21st
JAMIE RAVEN LIVE
Magic from the Britain's Got Talent star!

THU 23rd
I'M SORRY I HAVEN'T A CLUE

SAT 25th
ONE NIGHT IN NASHVILLE
A celebration of country music's greatest hits

MARCH
FRI 3rd
YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND:
THE MUSIC OF JAMES TAYLOR AND CAROLE KING

FRI 10th
THE ILLEGAL EAGLES

FRI 10th (Floral Hall)
BEYOND THE BARRICADE
The greatest songs in musical theatre

SAT 11th
WHITNEY – QUEEN OF THE NIGHT

MON 13th (1pm & 4pm)
MR BLOOM'S NURSERY – LIVE!

FRI 17th
THE MAGIC OF MOTOWN

MON 20th – SAT 25th
DREAMBOATS AND PETTICOATS
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*coach travel throughout

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*excursion to Helmsley & Thirsk
*guided tour of Hearbeat Country & Whitby
*coach travel throughout

UNDER 'LOCH & QUAY'
Departs: Wed 2nd August
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* tea/coffee on arrival
*admission to Inveraray Jail
*train journey to Oban
*cruise on Loch Lomond
*coach travel throughout

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* 2 nights half Board (Isle of Mull)
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Fri 3rd February
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MISC

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Email: **recruitment@integratepreston.org.uk** for a job pack or telephone **01772 333800**

For an informal discussion contact **Tracy Cowell** on **01695 731454**

Closing Date: Friday 13th January 2017

New Focus is a project within Integrate (Preston & Chorley) Ltd, a local charity established in 1983

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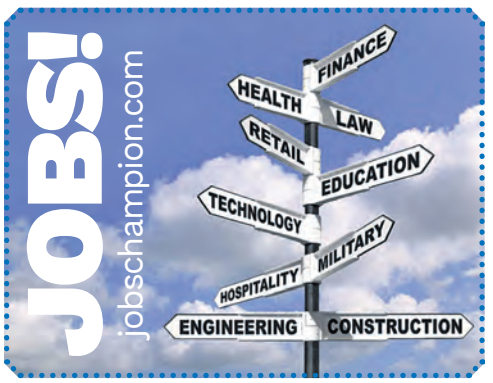

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ASHURST
- *Round includes:* Marlborough Gardens, Marlborough Ct, Mountwood, Melbreck

BIRCH GREEN
- *Round includes:* Yewdale

UPHOLLAND
- *Round includes:* Ormskirk Rd (part), Dorchester Rd, Carlton Ave, Daybrook

ORMSKIRK/AUGHTON/BURSCOUGH
- *Round includes:* Churchfields, Church St, Park Rd, Aughton St (part), Derby St West (part), Church Walks, The Stiles
- *Round includes:* Grammar School Gardens, Grammar School Court, Pinfold Rd, Merchant Rd, Mulbery Cl, Silk Court, Warpers Way, Spinner Mews
- *Round includes:* Square Ln, Chapel Ln, The Poplars
- *Round includes:* Liverpool Road North, Orrell Ln, Victoria St, Mart Ln, Orrell Mews, Peets Mill

RUFFORD
- *Round includes:* Brick Kiln Ln, The Hawthornes, Hesketh Gr, New Rd, Willow Gr, Sluice Ln, Oasis Cl

SCARISBRICK
- *Round includes:* Southport Rd (part), Bescar Brow Ln, Bullens Ln, Jacksmere Ln

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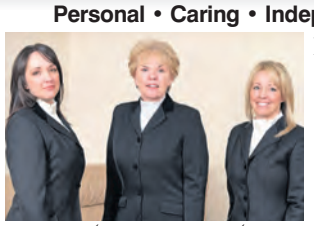
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01704 891555
22a, Liverpool Road North, Burscough, L40 5TP
Golden Charter Funeral Plans
Covering all areas

BIRTHDAY MEMORIAMS

HOLLAND
BERT

On his 80th Birthday

25th December

We will always miss you Dad. I know you watch over us but the pain it hurts incredibly. Rest in Peace Dad, til we meet again.
Karen, Carol, Paul, Gary, Colin and partners
xxxxx

HOLLAND
BERT

A year has passed since you were taken away now it's your 80th Birthday on Christmas Day.

Happy 80th Birthday. Love you always, From your loving Wife Marion
xx
Grandchildren and Great Grandchildren
Rest in peace xxx

BIRTHDAY MEMORIAMS

WILLIAMS
JILL
(BENNETT)
22nd December
Loving birthday memories of a precious Daughter and Sister Jill

How much we miss you being here, we really cannot say, the ache is deep inside our hearts, and never goes away.

Sadly missed.
Mum, David, Nigel, Julie, Ian and all nephews and nieces.
xxxxx

CHRISTMAS MEMORIAMS

GRIFFIN
JOHN
Christmas Day without you love, will never be the same
Love you forever and ever
Wife Muriel and Son John
XXX

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DEATHS

HALSALL
JOAN
Passed away peacefully at home on 11th December 2016 aged 81 years of Halsall in true and certain faith
Devoted Wife of the late Bob Halsall, adoring Mother of the late Julie Ann Wylam, loved by the late Jimmy Rose, and all her cousins, dearly loved by Len Sephton, loved and missed by all her family and friends.
Funeral Service and Interment at St. Cuthberts Church, Halsall, on Wednesday 21st December 2016 at 11.15am Family flowers only by request, but donations are being gratefully received for St. Cuthberts Church Spire. Donations and further enquiries please to Lisa Hunter, MLS Independent Funeral Directors, 20 Moss Delph Lane, Aughton. Tel: 01695 424888

WRIGHT
GLADYS
9th December 2016
Suddenly at home aged 88 years
Loving Wife of Trevor, devoted Mum of Stephen, dear Mother-in-law of Pat, cherished Sister of Mildred, will be sadly missed by all her family and friends.
Funeral service will take place at West Lancashire Crematorium on Thursday 22nd December at 10.00am. Family flowers only please by request, donations if desired for British Heart Foundation. All enquiries to Margaret Whitelam, Skelmersdale Funeral Service, 29/31 Sandy Lane Tel 01695 559868.

VICKERS
MARGARET
(NEE CHALLEN)
13th December 2016
Aged 86 years.
Devoted Wife of Eric. Adored Mum of Judith, Helen and Hilary. Proud and loving Gran of James and Tom. Will be deeply missed by all her family and many friends. Gifted, compassionate and life-long teacher. She will be remembered for her love, loyalty, gentleness and sense of humour.
Funeral service to take place at Holy Trinity Church, Tarleton on Friday 23rd December at 10.30am followed by private interment at St Mary's Churchyard.
Family flowers only please but donations if desired to the Royal British Legion and Holy Trinity Church, Tarleton. Further enquiries to Newland and Wilkinson Independent Funeral Directors, 311 Hesketh Lane, Tarleton, PR4 6RJ. Tel 01772 811165

DEATHS

JONES
ANN
Died peacefully at home
17th December 2016
Good night mum we will miss you so much
Forever in our hearts and thoughts
Carole and John
Grandchildren John, Mike and Gemma
Great grandchildren Tom Abbi Georgia Finley Jessica and Emily

WARING
CHRISTINE
8th December 2016
Suddenly in Hospital aged 58 years
She was loved very much and will be greatly missed by her family particularly her Three Children Danielle,Sara and Richard."We know that you have gone to a better place".
Funeral to be held at St Ambrose Church,Moss Lane,Leyland on Thursday 22nd December at 3pm. Family flowers only but donations if desired to Cancer Research UK.All enquiries to N & K Harvey Funerals Ltd,Leyland.Telephone 01772 622203

SINNOTT
YVONNE
Passed away peacefully on 12th December
Wife, Mother, Grandmother and Great Grandmother. Will be missed by all her family and friends.
Funeral Service to take place at West Lancs Crematorium, Burscough on Friday 23rd December at 11.30am. Flowers or donations to Cancer Research gratefully received.

IN MEMORIAM

DOYLE
CHRISTOPHER
DENHAM
1956-2015
Sunshine passes, shadows fall, love remembrance, outlasts all, and through the years be many or few, they are filled with remembrance of you.
Love Dad xx

Announcements

IN MEMORIAM

DOYLE
CHRISTOPHER
DENHAM
19/09/56 - 24/12/15
In loving memory of the day you went away. I lost my loving husband, my partner in my life. He was one of a kind, I was proud to be his wife. But I have the memories of times we shared together, that will live inside my heart, from this day and forever.
For he was one of a kind , a husband like no other, he was my best friend, my soul mate and my lover.
Rest in peace my angel. I just want you to know, I miss you more each passing day and how much I love you so. And when I get to heaven I know what I will do, you will be there with open arms and I will run to you.
Broken hearted Wife Joan xxx

DOYLE
CHRISTOPHER
DENHAM
19/09/56 - 24/12/15
In loving memory of the best ever brother. Today is full of memories, of a brother laid to rest. And every single one of them is filled with happiness. For you were someone special, always such a joy to know. And there was so much pain when it was time to let you go. That's why this special message is sent to heaven above, for the angels to take care of you and give you all our love.
Rest In Peace Denny.
Love always Alan, Carole, Marian and all their families.

IN MEMORIAM

DOYLE
CHRISTOPHER
DENHAM
19/09/56 - 24/12/15
Christmas wishes to a much loved Husband, Dad, Grandad, Son, Brother, Uncle and Great Grandad.
The photograph we cherish that surrounds us every day. Helps to keep you close to us, although you are far away. Now Christmas time is dawning and although you're in our hearts, its just the hardest time of all for us to be apart. But memories will bring us strength, and love will see us through.
Our tears will all be fleeting and we will smile again for you.
Forever in our hearts and minds.
Love you forever.
All your Family. xxxx

DOYLE
CHRISTOPHER
DENHAM
19/09/56 - 24/12/15
In loving memory of our wonderful Dad, who was so special and who was loved so very much and brought so much happiness to the many hearts you touched. You were always kind and caring and so understanding too, and if help was ever needed Dad, it so freely came from you. You were a gift to all the world and brought joy to everyone, and life has never been the same ever since you have been gone. Love and miss you Dad, forever in our hearts.
Love always Christopher, Raymond, Michael, Gary and all their families.

Christmas Deadlines

Due to the Christmas and Boxing Day Bank Holidays, the booking deadline for Private Advertisements is as follows:

For publication **Wednesday 28th Dec**
DEADLINE 5pm Thursday 22nd Dec

Wishing all our readers a very Merry Christmas

Announcements

IN MEMORIAM

BALL
JOHN A
21st December 2015
1 year today

His weary hours and days of pain, his troubled nights are passed, and in our aching hearts we know, he has found sweet rest at last. Your loving children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

21st December 2015
The face I loved is now laid low, his loving voice is still, the hand so often clasped in mine, lies now in deaths cold chill. I often sit and think of him, when I am all alone, for memory is the only thing, that grief can call it's own.
your loving wife
Pauline xx

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PUBLIC NOTICES

West Lancashire Borough Council
Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 - Article 15

APPLICATION(S) FOR PLANNING PERMISSION

Application No: 2016/1198/FUL Proposed Timber Cattery to Rear of Existing Dwelling Comprising of 6 Cat Rooms, 1 Quarantine Room and 1 Reception Room at 1B Woodmoss Lane, Scarisbrick.

Application No: 2016/1217/FUL Variation of Condition No. 3 imposed on planning permission 8/6/7701/R1 to read: The development shall be carried out in accordance with appearance, landscaping, means of access, layout and scale as shown on plan reference 16-010-100,16-010-110, 16-010-130, 16-010-131, 16-010-132, 16-010-133, 16-010-190 and 5293.01A at Land To The West Of, Guinea Hall Lane, Banks.

Application No: 2016/1251/FUL Variation of Condition No. 20 of planning permission 2016/0335/FUL to read 'Unit 6 Clothing, footwear, jewellery, accessories and ancillary items, DIY home improvement goods, garden products, pets and pet products, furnishings, beds, electrical goods, household textiles, furniture and floor coverings, and for no other purpose in Class A1 of the Schedule of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 or any provision equivalent to that class in any statutory instrument revoking or re-erecting that order with or without modification' at Unit 6, Ringtail Retail Park, Burscough.

APPLICATION(S) AFFECTING A CONSERVATION AREA / LISTED BUILDING

Application No: 2016/1252/FUL Variation of Condition No. 2 imposed on planning permission 2014/1177/ARM to vary the approved plans with details shown on the following plans 765_02_A and 765_03_A at Rear Of The Courtyard, 94 Church Road, Tarleton.

Application No: 2016/1259/LBC Listed Building Consent - Revised design of previously approved glass linkway to increase the amount of glass by reducing the number of panels from 4 to 3 and utilising a single opening fully glazed door at Old Bounty Farm, Pimbo Lane, Up Holland.

Application No: 2016/1298/FUL Conversion of a 4 bedroom detached house into 2 x 3 bedroom semi detached houses at Lancaster Barn, Lancaster Lane, Parbold.

The applications are available for viewing on the Council's website www.westlancs.gov.uk/planning. Alternatively, the application can be viewed during normal office hours at 52 Derby Street, Ormskirk and at 1st Floor, The Concourse, Skelmersdale. If you wish to comment on the proposal you can do so via the Council's web site, by e.mail to plan.apps@westlancs.gov.uk or in writing to Development and Regeneration Services, 52 Derby Street, Ormskirk, but these must be received within 21 days of the date of this notice quoting the application no. Any comments made will be available for public inspection.

Applications for Minor Commercial and Householder Development

In the event that an appeal is made against a decision of the Council to refuse to grant planning permission for the proposed development, and that appeal then proceeds by way of the expedited procedure under the written representations procedure, any representations made to the Council about an application will be passed to the Secretary of State and there will be no opportunity to make further representations.

John R Harrison DipEnvP., MRTPI Director of Development and Regeneration
Dated: 21st December 2016
PDNOT928

LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
(B5195 TURNPIKE ROAD, MOSS DELPH ROAD, A59 NORTHWAY, AUGHTON, WEST LANCASHIRE BOROUGH)
(TEMPORARY PROHIBITION OF THROUGH TRAFFIC)
(TEMPORARY SPEED RESTRICTION) ORDER 2017

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that Lancashire County Council intend to make an Order under **Section 14(1) (a) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984**, as amended, the effect of which will be to temporarily prohibit traffic on the roads set out in this notice.

1. No person shall cause any motor vehicle to proceed over the following lengths of highway in the borough of West Lancashire.
i. B5195 Turnpike Road at its junction with A59 Northway;
ii. Moss Delph Lane at its junction with A59 Northway,
2. The prohibitions shown at article 1 will be operative from 0800 hours on Monday 16th January 2017 until 1800 hours on Monday 20th March 2017 or until completion of the works within this period.
3. An alternative route for vehicular traffic affected by the closures is as follows:-
i. A59 Northway – Turnpike Road – B5195 Turnpike Road and vice versa;
ii. A59 Northway – Winifred Lane – Noel Gate – Moss Delph Lane and vice versa
4. And further; No person shall cause any motor vehicle to proceed at a speed exceeding 30 MPH over that length of A59 Northway, from its junction with St Michael Road to its junction with B5195 Turnpike Road.
5. The prohibition shown at article 4 will be operative from 0800 hours on Tuesday 3rd January 2017 until 1800 hours on Monday 20th March 2017 or until completion of the works within this period
No speed limit imposed by this order applies to vehicles falling within regulation 3(4) of the Road Traffic Exemptions (Special Forces) (Variation and Amendment) Regulations 2011 when used in accordance with regulation 3(5) of those Regulations
The temporary prohibition is necessary to allow gas main replacement works to be carried out.
Authority given for this Order to be made:
Michael White, Network Regulation Manager, Lancashire Highway Services, 0300 123 6701 [Ref: HRiT/17/8/6071/ARH]

www.lancashire.gov.uk
Lancashire County Council

NOTICE OF PROPOSAL
ROAD TRAFFIC REGULATION ACT 1984
LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL (A565 SOUTHPORT NEW ROAD, TARLETON AND BANKS, WEST LANCASHIRE BOROUGH) (REVOCATION AND 50MPH SPEED LIMIT) ORDER 201*

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that Lancashire County Council propose to make the above Speed Limit Order under Section 84 of and Part IV of Schedule 9 to the **Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984**, as amended, the effect of which will be to:

1. Revoke the "Lancashire County Council (Speed Limit Management) (Various Roads, West Lancashire Borough Area) (50MPH Speed Limit) (No 1) Order 2010" insofar as it relates to A565 Southport New Road, Banks.
2. Introduce a 50MPH Speed Limit on Southport New Road, Tarleton/Banks, from a point 226 metres south east of the centreline of Station Road (C141) in a south easterly then north easterly direction to a point 76.5 metres south west of the centreline of A59 Liverpool Road.

A copy of the draft Order and associated documents for proposing to make the Order may be inspected during normal office hours at the offices of West Lancashire Borough Council, PO Box 16, 52 Derby Street, Ormskirk, L39 2DF and at the offices of The Director of Governance Finance & Public Services, Lancashire County Council, Christ Church Precinct, County Hall, Preston PR1 8XJ. Any representations or objections (specifying the grounds on which they are made) relating to the proposal must be made in writing and should be sent to The Director of Governance, Finance & Public Services, Lancashire County Council, PO Box 78, County Hall, Preston PR1 8XJ or by e-mail to tro-consultation@lancashire.gov.uk quoting ref:LSG4\894.3321\AFR before the 18 January 2017.

Ian Young, Director of Governance, Finance and Public Services
21 December 2016

www.lancashire.gov.uk
Lancashire County Council

WEST LANCASHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL
FEES FOR PRIVATE HIRE & HACKNEY CARRIAGE DRIVER, OPERATOR & VEHICLE LICENCES

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN pursuant to Section 70(3) of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 (the Act), that West Lancashire Borough Council intends to vary the maximum fees specified in Section 70(2) of the Act to be charged for the granting of private hire and hackney carriage driver, vehicle and operator licences with effect from the 1st April 2017 as follows:

	Existing (2016/17)	Proposed (2017/18)	Unsuccessful application refund
Driver Licence Applications – Hackney Carriage, Private Hire and Dual			
Driver Licence – new (3 year licence)*	£148.28	£149.57	N/A
Driver Licence – renewal (3 year licence)*	£98.86	£99.06	N/A
* Applications incur additional fees not set by the Council. These include online Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) enhanced disclosure, medical examination and DVLA mandate. The online DBS service includes a £9.60 validation fee plus the cost of the disclosure.			
Vehicle Licence Applications – Hackney Carriage and Private Hire			
Hackney Carriage – new (12 month licence - incl. plate)	£256.15	£211.71	£99.06
Hackney Carriage – renewal (12 month licence - incl. plate)	£242.03	£199.82	£126.80
Private Hire Vehicle – new (12 month licence - incl. plate)	£229.56	£191.90	£79.25
Private Hire Vehicle – renewal (12 month licence - incl. plate)	£215.44	£181.99	£108.97
Private Hire Operator Licence Applications (5 year licence):			
1 - 10 Vehicles	£215.65	£178.31	£79.25
11 - 20 Vehicles	£271.85	£275.37	£178.31
21 - 30 Vehicles	£428.37	£432.86	£316.99
31 - 40 Vehicles	£543.70	£549.74	£435.86
41 - 50 Vehicles	£708.56	£711.23	£554.74
Over 50 Vehicles	£808.37	£810.29	£633.98
Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing – general			
Transfer of Vehicle Licence (change of owner)	£16.48	£18.81	N/A
Replacement Vehicle Plate	£16.48	£18.81	N/A
Replacement Driver Badge	£16.48	£18.81	N/A
Duplicate Driver Licence	£16.48	£18.81	N/A
Duplicate Vehicle Licence	£16.48	£18.81	N/A
Re-sit Knowledge Test	£16.48	£18.81	N/A

A copy of this Notice will be displayed on the Council's website as well as deposited at Council Offices located at 52 Derby Street, Ormskirk and Robert Hodge Centre, Stanley Way, Skelmersdale. The Notice will be open to public inspection without payment for a period of twenty-eight (28) days from the date of publication of this Notice. Any objections or representations in respect of the above-mentioned variation of licence fees may be made in writing to the Director of Leisure and Wellbeing within the period specified above.

Dated: 21 December 2016

Mr D Tilleray, Director of Leisure and Wellbeing
West Lancashire Borough Council, Robert Hodge Centre, Stanley Way, Skelmersdale, Lancashire WN8 8EE
www.westlancs.gov.uk

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Asking Santa for this could be a bit much!

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SO THAT'S it then. After wrapping my fingers around 88 steering wheel rims and wearing down the soles of my shoes wandering around 34 classic car shows I can finally slump into the sofa, settle down with a mince pie and start writing my letter to Father Christmas.

I'm almost certain the sleigh's TARDIS-esque qualities mean there's room for a car to be squeezed in alongside all the other presents (although for insurance-related reasons I'd rather it wasn't dropped down a chimney), ready for delivery to Simister HQ this Sunday. The big question is, which of those 88 cars should it be?

It'd be tempting to say the Ferrari Testarossa. The other day I was having an argument with the organiser of a classic car show about to put on a display of the 20 greatest Ferraris, after I suggested said showcase should include the automotive star of *Miami Vice*.

'Would YOU put a Testarossa in your top 20 Ferraris?' came the slightly baffled retort, as though it's accepted tradition the Testarossa's a bit rubbish compared to, say, an F40 or a 458 Italia.

Nonsense – if the spine-tingling exhaust note and easy-going character of the one I drove was anything to go by, the Testarossa is a wonderful car.

But I suspect asking Father Christmas for a present now worth £100,000 might well be a little bit much!

At the other end of the scale I very much enjoyed driving an MGF, Austin Allegro Estate and, erm, a Ford Orion for the first time, but none are going to keep me awake with excitement on Christmas Eve.

Then there's the 1904 Vauxhall that took 20 minutes to start up and was vaguely terrifying even at its 18mph top speed, and the Triumph TR6 that stank of petrol the entire weekend I had it and apparently caught fire a few days after handing it back. No thanks.

Rather more memorable is the £500 Ford Puma I've been running as a sort of company car over the last few months or I can recommend a Honda NSX, Jaguar XJR and Porsche 928.

But despite the best efforts of a bright yellow TVR Chimaera to win me over there's one machine that had me utterly smitten – the MGB GT V8, which is essentially the classic car I've already got, but with the four-cylinder engine replaced with a considerably larger and much louder V8.

The combination of pert looks I'm already accustomed to and one of the best soundtracks on offer anywhere in motoring had me completely hooked.

If you can sort one of those out for me, Father Christmas, I'd be most grateful. I've been a good boy this year, and all that…

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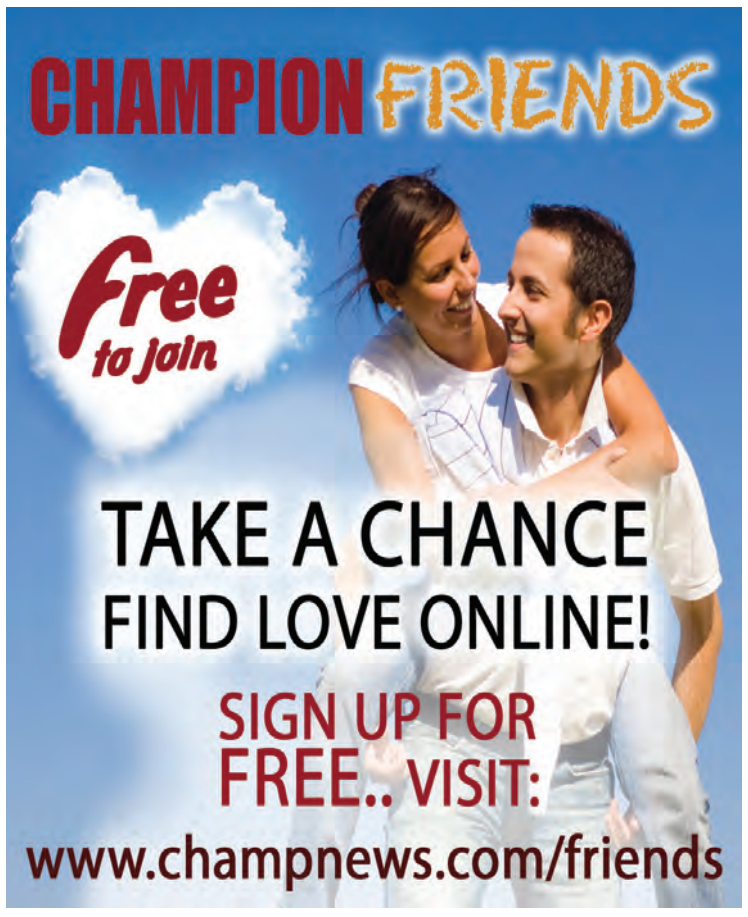

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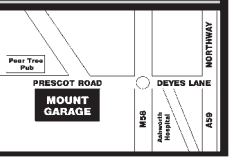

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Income drop prompts cut in team budget

SKELMERSDALE United have been forced to cut the budget for players to help cope with a loss of funding.

A club statement confirmed that they will bring in the cost-cutting measures until the end of the season.

The statement, by chairman Paul Griffiths, said: "You will no doubt be aware that certain players have sought to leave the club. This is purely for financial reasons.

"In light of our current league position and performances we have suffered a decrease in attendances and sponsorships and this has had a large impact on our income stream.

"Therefore I have informed our manager this week that we will have to cut his playing budget, and unless some serious sponsorship can be found this will be until the end of the season.

"Let me make it clear that I do not under any circumstances blame any player who decides to leave. We all have to make a living and we live to the means at our disposal.

"I wish all those players the very best.

"Tommy Lawson could easily have walked away, but being the man he is he has decided to support the club and see things through.

"He has a daunting task ahead of him, but Tommy being Tommy he has already put plans into motion to keep us moving forward, and he has all our gratitude.

"Myself and the board will do all we can to reverse our fortunes and I will be looking for the local business community to help if they can.

"It's hard times for all of us. I know those of you who have seen it through so far will continue to do so and I thank every one of you.

"If anyone has any ideas or can assist in any way please come and talk to us."

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Lawson promises to battle on despite club facing financial crisis

Report by **Mike Dawber**

SKELMERSDALE United manager Tommy Lawson has vowed to battle on and do his best to keep his team in the EvoStick Premier Division despite facing an exodus of players after the club's decision to effectively become amateur due to a financial crisis.

The players were told at the weekend that the club would only be able to afford to pay their expenses in future due to facing severe financial difficulties.

Lawson, now in his 11th season as Skem boss, admitted that other clubs have already been knocking on the door for players and he is resigned to the fact that he is likely to lose most of his higher rated members of the squad.

He told the Champion: "It's a difficult situation for us but the board are doing their best to solve the problems and now I've just got to roll up my sleeves and try and make sure we avoid relegation.

"It's a tough challenge because the Evo-Stik Premier Division has plenty of good teams in it and some who are backed by some pretty big money.

Skem manager Tommy Lawson

"But we've never been big spenders ourselves. In fact, we've never really had any money to bring in players. I've always had to work with youngsters and try and build teams that way.

"The situation we are in now provides a good opportunity for local young players to come in and show us what they can do to develop their careers. We will be a development club. We have a good record of bringing on young players who have then left us and gone on to bigger clubs such as Chris Almond, Josh Hine and Sam Ashton.

"I've already got three players from Bolton Wanderers on work experience and we will be looking to bring in more kids and polish them up like we have always done."

Lawson is confident Skem can stay in the division despite a poor start to the season which has seen them anchored in the relegation zone.

He said: "We have played two top teams in the last two weeks and we matched them and were unlucky not to take points off them.

"It shows we have the basis for a good team and we need to build on that with the players who stay and those who join us."

He added that it was vital for supporters to get behind the team at this time.

"It is a very trying time for us and we need the need the help of the fans.

"We've all got to pull together at a time like this and I want the supporters to come down and get behind the players so we can sustain non-league football at Skelmersdale."

Injury-time sickener after plucky effort against the table-toppers

Skelmersdale United 1
Rushall Olympic 2

By **Neil Leatherbarrow**

SKELMERSDALE United suffered a cruel defeat after conceding an injury-time winner against table-toppers Rushall.

After an exciting opening few minutes when Rushall put a shot just wide and Skem's Dylan Smith headed just wide the game was a bit of a slow burner.

The league's top scorer Alex Reid was thwarted with some ease by Martin Fearon after firing in a shot on 17 minutes, then after a foul on Hazeldine on 31 minutes, Kenny Strickland's free kick went over the crossbar.

Rushall struck on 34 minutes. Jazz Luckie ran at the defence, his route taking him towards the middle of the pitch and his shot from 20 yards struck a defender leaving Fearon no chance as it went into the corner of the net.

In the period between the goal and the interval Skelmersdale threatened. A free-kick was cleared for a corner then Luke Wall had a shot blocked by a Rushall defender and Hazeldine shot wide. Finally in added time Almond broke clear and squared the ball to Strickland, however, his shot went wide.

The pattern of play in the second-half was pretty straightforward, Skelmersdale pushed to equalise and Rushall fell back.

Immediately after half-time Reid put a shot off target as Rushall attacked but then Skelmersdale fairly dominated possession.

Wall met a Tom Ince cross at the far post but his effort was high and wide.

On a swift counterattack Rushall found the net but were offside, then Almond went close for Skem. Four minutes from time the ball was played to Hazeldine's feet, at his back was big centre-back Henry Eze, Hazeldine riddled past him and with an outstretched leg was tripped.

The referee awarded a penalty and Eze exited the pitch after a second yellow card.

Almond stepped up to send the Rushall keeper Jose Veiga the wrong way from the spot.

Rushall reacted by going onto the attack and won a corner. The ball wasn't cleared properly and Joe Hull hit a low shot into the Skem goal from 12 yards.

The game was already two minutes into added time and came as a hammer blow.

Next up for Skem is a Boxing Day derby encounter at the home of local rivals Marine and then Matlock at home on Thursday, December 29.

Linnets can't hold on against 10-man Celtic

Farsley Celtic 3
Burscough 1

BURSCOUGH took the lead inside the first minute but couldn't hold on against 10- man Farsley Celtic.

The Linnets made a stunning start as they opened the scoring inside a minute, a defender gifting the ball away to Mamoke Akaunu who slotted home past a stationary keeper.

Lewis Nightingale then received a yellow card for diving as he attempted to win a penalty, before a tackle was adjudged a foul by referee Patrick Mahon who gave Nightingale his marching orders.

Despite this Farsley started to take control of the game and midway through the half, the home side levelled.

On the stroke of half time Farsley took the lead, Deacey playing through Ross Daly who beat two players before firing into the bottom corner.

Substitute Ryan Watson secured the three points as he fired a superb strike into the top corner from the edge of the box to end any hopes Burscough had of making a comeback

● BURSCOUGH have appointed Keith McCann as manager. It follows the departure of Dave Powell last week, with the club struggling at the foot of the table.

Simon Hardman has also been announced as the new head coach, with Phil Fisher remaining as goalkeeping coach.

A statement from the club said: "The trio of management will work as a unit to move the club forward in an upwards trend."

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